

Why Don't Children Walk To School Anymore?

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Did you know that only 12.9% of children currently walk or bike to school? This is down from over 40% in 1969¹. Even among those who live within one mile of their school, over half of them *never walk or bike*².

Why is walking to school important? *Kids are overweight!* Walking to school is a great way to increase physical activity in children. The benefits of walking or biking to school include prevention of excess weight gain, decreased sedentary behavior, development of healthy habits at an early age, improved neighborhood safety due to decreased school traffic, and opportunity for social and/or family interaction. It may even help improve their grades!

Why don't children walk or bike to school? In a recent survey of parents of elementary school children³, the number one reason for parents not wanting their children to walk to school was SAFETY. Parents rated traffic safety, speeding cars, and lack of supervision as barriers to their children walking to school. Also, some parents thought that it was too far for their children to walk to school, even those who live within one mile of their school! Over half of parents drive their children to school everyday, and not with a carpool.

What can be done? TAKE ACTION! Walk with your children to school (a great way to increase your own physical activity!) or talk to other concerned parents and teachers at your child's school. A 'walking school bus' is a great way to ensure proper supervision for your child while he/she reaps the benefits of walking to and from school. A 'walking school bus' works just like a regular school bus, except that everyone is walking! The walkers take a set route to school, supervised by at least one parent. (Bonus: a 'walking school bus' is great for the environment!). To encourage children to walk or bike to school, a 'Walk to School' event can be held at your child's school. October is Walk to School month.

For more information, visit www.walktoschool.org or www.cawalktoschool.com. Schools can also apply for *Safe Routes to School* grants which will provide funds to increase awareness, build sidewalks, etc. For more information on *Safe Routes to School* in California, visit www.saferoutestoschool.org.

So what are you waiting for? Get your kids ready for school, tie up your shoelaces and enjoy the walk!

¹ McDonald, N. (2007). Active transportation to school: Trends among U.S. schoolchildren, 1969-2001. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 32(6), 509-516.

² Martin, S. & Carlson, S. (2005). Barriers to children walking to or from school – United States, 2004. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 54, 949-952.

³ Taylor, R. (2008). The perceived benefits and barriers of walking or biking to school: A survey of parents at three elementary schools in San Luis Obispo County, California. *Master's Thesis, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California.*